A Decade of Accomplishments

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Ministry of Women's Equality

The Ministry of Women's Equality was established in 1991 with a mandate to work in partnership with all government ministries, Crown corporations and agencies, community groups and the private sector to build a society where women experience equality in all aspects of their lives.

A Decade of Accomplishments is a snapshot of major activities and accomplishments to advance women's equality. We acknowledge there are many other accomplishments that have moved us forward to our vision of a society where women's contributions are recognized and valued, and equality is a reality.

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Investing in B.C.'s Future

A vision for British Columbia

B.C. has a history of leadership in women's equality – one that is enriched and built upon continuously as women move forward economically, socially and in every other realm of daily life. We have achieved a lot in the last 10 years, including the establishment in 1991 of Canada's only free-standing Ministry of Women's Equality. However, there is still work to do to achieve full and lasting equality for women in British Columbia.

This document highlights the progress we've made in areas such as health care, education, economic equality and efforts to end violence against women. It also sets the stage for further, focused discussions on how women and government can continue to work together, making sure we maintain this momentum well into the future.

The government is committed to building a society where women's contributions are fully valued and recognized, where women have equal choice and access to opportunity, and where women are free from fear of violence, abuse and discrimination. This is our vision for the future of British Columbia – a future we want to continue building in partnership with women.

Women's changing role in society

Women make up more than half of B.C.'s population, and 59.2 per cent of women over 15 are in the workforce. By 2007, as many women as men will be working in paid jobs in the province and, if current trends continue, more women than men will have a post-secondary education. In 1996, women received 57.9 per cent of bachelor's, 53.5 per cent of master's and 31.3 per cent of PhD degrees completed in B.C.

Markers of inequality

Even though they are working outside the home more, and achieving more in terms of education, women still face significant economic barriers. Women working full-time, full-year, still earn just 73 cents for every dollar a man earns. More women than men work in minimum wage jobs. More women hold part-time jobs. And women are still the primary caregivers in B.C.

Accomplishments: past and future

Clearly, despite our progress, there is still much to do to achieve full equality for women in British Columbia. Investing in this priority is an investment in a healthy future for all British Columbians.

The government is committed to building a society where women's contributions are fully valued and recognized, where women have equal choice and access to opportunity, and where women are free from fear of violence, abuse and discrimination.

Closing the Wage Gap

Women remain under-represented in many occupations, and in senior management ranks. Overall, women still earn substantially less than men. Since 1991, the B.C. government has implemented a number of specialized programs to improve women's economic opportunities.

Public service pay equity and low-wage redress

Since 1991, $388.5 million has been invested to bring the salaries of female B.C. public service employees in line with those of men, beginning with low-wage earners, most of whom are women

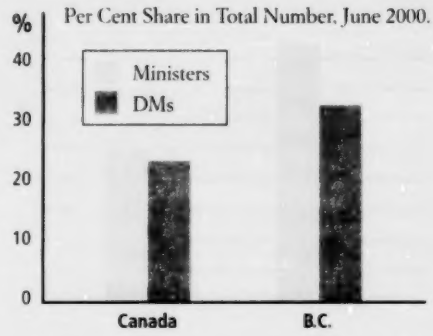
- As of January 2000, the female-to-male earnings ratio among regular full-time public service employees was approximately 90 per cent, up from an estimated 81 per cent in 1991.
- In the education sector, the ratio within support staff bargaining units currently ranges from 85 per cent to 95 per cent.
- The female-to-male earnings ratio within the health care sector, which includes acute and long-term care workers, was estimated in March 2000 to be approximately 97 per cent, a significant increase from approximately 86 per cent in 1991.

Public service employment equity

The provincial government's Employment Equity Program was designed to ensure greater representation of women in management positions within the public service.

- In 1991, 10.9 per cent of senior public service managers were women; by January 2000, that proportion had nearly tripled, to 32.2 per cent. The number of women deputy ministers rose by a similar proportion.
- In 1994, the B.C. Human Rights Commission developed comprehensive guidelines for assessing employment equity programs. These guidelines, combined with public sector leadership, are valuable tools for private sector employers to use in developing their own employment equity programs.

Women in Top Government Positions: B.C. vs. Canada



Fighting discrimination and harassment in the workplace

B.C.'s human rights legislation and government policies clearly identify appropriate workplace behaviours, emphasizing prevention of discrimination and harassment.

Initiatives in education

Women still face barriers in obtaining higher levels of education. For some, the primary problem is financial; for others, it may be balancing education and family commitments. Some women are reluctant to enter fields that

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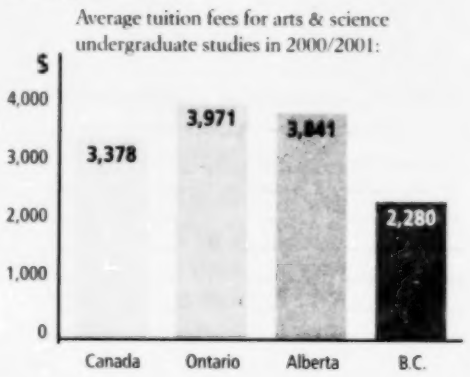
have been traditionally dominated by men. Over the past decade, the British Columbia government has instituted a number of programs supporting women to pursue higher education.

MORE OPTIONS AND SPACES. Thousands of new student spaces have been created since 1996 in three new universities – University of Northern British Columbia, Royal Roads, and Tech B.C. – and 12 university-colleges. Combined with low university fees, this enables more women than ever before to get a post-secondary education in British Columbia.

Average Tuition Fees



ADULT BASIC EDUCATION. Adults who did not complete high school can now complete secondary school tuition-free, or they can get B.C. secondary school accreditation without charge, by taking the General Education Development (GED) tests.

LOAN REMISSION AWARDS. The B.C. Loan Remission Program reduces outstanding B.C. student loans for students who have successfully completed their studies and demonstrated personal responsibility. Since 1994, women students are estimated to have received 58 per cent of loan remission awards, worth some $24 million.

GRANTS FOR HIGH-NEED STUDENTS. British Columbia provides grants to students with dependants, and high-need, part-time students, through a program introduced in 1998. These grants are particularly helpful for single mothers, who must study while caring for their children and working to make ends meet.

Women in non-traditional work

ALTERNATE ROUTES TO COMPUTING INTERNSHIP PROGRAM. This joint university/industry partnership gives women access to the computer and high technology skills they will need to be successful in the knowledge-based economy of the future.

WOMEN IN TRADES AND TECHNOLOGY. WITT is a national non-profit network dedicated to assisting women to enter trades in which they are under-represented. Since 1995, the Ministry of Women's Equality has supported WITT by helping to fund public education, materials and other resources.

THE INDUSTRIAL TRAINING AND APPRENTICESHIP COMMISSION. ITAC was created in 1997 to expand training and employment opportunities in designated trades and occupations for women and other groups that have traditionally been under-represented in trades.

In 1999, the number of women enrolled in industrial training apprenticeship programs increased to 7.3 per cent, up from 5 per cent in 1993. Women are apprenticed in approximately half the active trades in the system.

EQUITY HIRE FOR MAJOR CAPITAL WORK PROJECTS. The B.C. government has worked to increase representation of women on major projects like the Island Highway.

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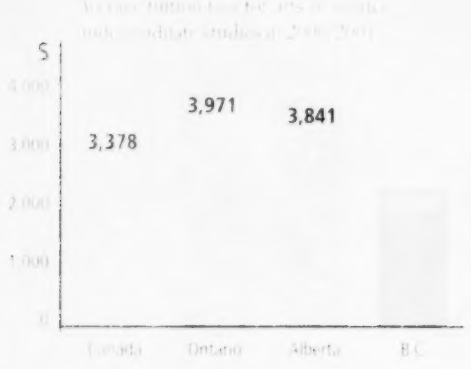

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Closing the Poverty Gap

According to Statistics Canada, 45 per cent of single women in British Columbia live below the poverty line. B.C. women who are Aboriginal or members of a visible minority fare even worse.

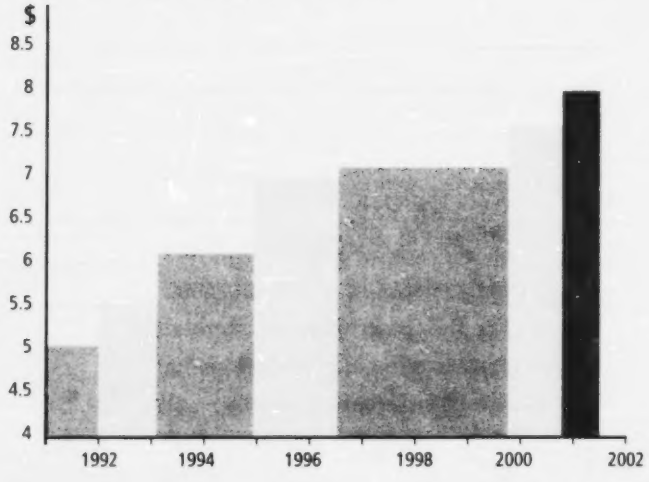
In 1995, over half of B.C. women heading single-parent families had incomes below the poverty line.

Polls show that B.C. women are concerned about their economic security, and with good reason. Nearly three-quarters of minimum wage earners over the age of 25 are women.

Increases to the minimum wage

Since 1991, the provincial government has increased the minimum wage seven times. On November 1, 2000 the minimum wage increased from $7.15 per hour to $7.60 per hour. Effective November 1, 2001 it will increase to $8.00 per hour. Any increase in the minimum wage has a positive impact on the economic situation of service, domestic and agricultural workers, most of whom are women.

B.C. Minimum Wage in the 1990s



Raising employment standards

In 1993, the government initiated the first public review in the 70-year history of employment standards in British Columbia. The resulting Employment Standards Act introduced changes to enhance protection of B.C. workers, particularly women, and provided them with compensation and benefits as good as or better than any in Canada. These changes include:

FAMILY LEAVE. Bereavement and family responsibility leaves have been added by the Act. Pregnancy leave is protected; an employer cannot require a woman to start her leave because she unable to do the work. Women can apply for an extra six weeks of leave after pregnancy if special medical circumstances warrant.

PROTECTION FOR DOMESTIC WORKERS. Domestic workers, predominantly female, are now protected through limitations on minimum wages and hours of work. In 1995, B.C. introduced a requirement that persons employed in private homes be registered with the Director of Employment Standards, a provision primarily for domestic workers and home-based garment workers, the majority of whom are women.

PROTECTION FOR NON-UNION WORKERS. One in three B.C. women working full time belongs to a union. The Act provides protection and benefits that significantly improve the working conditions for the remaining two-thirds who are non-union workers.

CHANGES TO THE LABOUR RELATIONS CODE. It is easier now for workers to negotiate a first collective agreement. Union membership means better wages, benefits and working conditions, as well as improved job security. In 1998, full-time unionized women in British Columbia earned on average $19.22 per hour as compared to the average of $13.27 earned by non-unionized women. In addition, Workers' Compensation Board legislation is now extended to banking, office and domestic employees, most of whom are women.

Support for seniors

Women are more likely to interrupt their careers, work part-time, or change jobs more frequently because they continue to bear the primary responsibility for children. When a woman earns less during her most productive earning years, it means a lower pension later. In recognition of this, the government has developed the following supports for senior women.

CHANGES TO THE B.C. PENSION BENEFIT STANDARDS ACT. Pension access has been improved, so that elderly women are more likely to enjoy a reasonable income in retirement. For instance, part-time workers can now be covered. The government has made it easier for workers leaving one employer to carry their pension to their next employer without penalty. Contributions are now locked in after a shorter period of employment, and minimum survivor benefits requirements have been revised.

SURVIVOR BENEFITS. Legislation in 1993 governing the Workers' Compensation Board has extended survivor benefits retroactively to 1985 to all surviving spouses of workers killed on the job, regardless of whether they have remarried.

PROPERTY TAX RELIEF. Elderly women, often widows, may find themselves house-rich but cash-poor. The provincial government has provided for property tax relief in the form of land tax deferment. A homeowner over 60 may defer property taxes, which are paid only when the home is transferred to a different owner. This program is in addition to the Homeowner Grant Program, also available to seniors. It particularly benefits senior women, who tend to live longer.

PENSIONS AFTER DIVORCE. Changes to the Family Relations Act provide for automatic division and direct payment of pensions to both spouses following marriage breakdown, so that the unpensioned spouse, most often the woman, does not have to rely on payment from the other.

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Family-Friendly Policies

Women are still the primary caregivers in our society, despite their increasing participation in the paid labour force. Women who take career breaks to have and care for their children or other family members may have difficulty re-entering the labour market.

Child care

Access to quality, affordable and appropriate child care can be a major factor in a woman's ability to succeed in the labour market and gain economic security. Government spending on child care is currently $188 million per year. This funding includes various types of financial assistance to licensed group and family child care providers. Government has increased the number of licensed child care spaces from 43,000 in 1992 to more than 72,000 in 1999.

UNIVERSAL CHILD CARE. Beginning in January 2001, Child Care BC will provide publicly funded before- and after-school care for children from kindergarten to age 12 in participating licensed group care facilities. Parents will save up to $1,100 per child per year. The program is a modest first step towards a comprehensive made-in-BC system of child care, and will be expanded as budgets permit.

CHILD CARE SUBSIDY. This program assists low- and moderate-income families with the cost of child care. The number of children receiving the Child Care Subsidy has more than doubled since 1992 to just under 40,000. Government currently spends $123 million per year on child care subsidies.

OTHER CHILD CARE PROGRAMS. The Ministry of Social Development and Economic Security also administers four child care grant programs and provides training, support, resources and referral services for child care providers and parents in more than 170 communities throughout the province.

B.C. FAMILY BONUS. The current child care subsidy of $113 million supports more than 37,500 children, 116% more children than in 1991. It provides $105 per child per month to approximately 230,000 low- and modest-income families. It has been estimated that the program has helped to raise nearly 19 per cent of working families above the poverty line.

HEALTHY KIDS PROGRAM. Healthy Kids, introduced in 1996, gives basic dental and vision care to children in low-income families.

Progress in Child Care – 1992-1999

	1992	1999	CHANGE
B.C. population age 0-12	606,210	637,484	+ 5%
Licensed child care spaces	42,757	72,730	+ 70%
Under age 3 spaces (licensed group care)	1,270	3,553	+180%
Children receiving child care subsidy	16,862	38,413	+129%
School-based young parent programs	15	48	+220%

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Family Maintenance Enforcement Program

Canadian society has long recognized that parents have financial responsibilities for their children, responsibilities that do not end when a couple separates.

The Family Maintenance Enforcement Program assumes responsibility for monitoring and enforcing all maintenance orders and agreements filed with it. Since it was established in 1991, its caseload has more than doubled, growing from 18,987 cases enrolled in 1991-92 to 47,253 cases in 1999-2000. Payments to families have increased four-fold over the same time period, from $26 million to $104 million. Additionally, amendments to the Family Maintenance Enforcement Act and the Pension Benefits Standards Act allow unpaid child support and alimony payments to be taken out of current pension payments.

Affordable housing for families

Since 1994, the provincial government has approved Homes BC funding for more than 6,500 units of affordable housing across British Columbia. Homes BC is a comprehensive housing program that provides low- and moderate-income British Columbians with secure, affordable homes. B.C. is one of only two provinces that continue to fund new social housing through comprehensive housing programs.

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Supporting Women's Diversity

Women sometimes face multiple barriers to employment. Government acts as a leader and role model in hiring a workforce that represents the diversity of the people of British Columbia.

Historical attitudes and employment practices have produced employment barriers and disadvantages for four groups in particular, with the result that they are under-represented in the labour force or are concentrated in low paying jobs. These groups are:

- aboriginal peoples,
- persons with disabilities,
- visible minorities, and
- women, in under-represented occupations, whether or not they are members of a designated group.

Government's employment equity program, introduced in 1991, was designed to identify and remove employment barriers in the public service, and to ensure that government employees are not denied employment, advancement or training opportunities for reasons unrelated to their ability to do the job.

Stopping Violence Against Women

All members of society are affected by violence. But women, especially those in relationships, remain the most vulnerable.

The Ministry of Women's Equality funds community agencies to provide support and intervention services to women and their children leaving abusive relationships. As well, the ministry has prevention strategies and programs designed with the goal of stopping violence against women before it starts.

Violence awareness

Annual public education programs by the Ministry of Women's Equality have started to change society's attitudes.

Violence prevention

A Safer Future for B.C. Women is a program established in 1996. It provides assistance to community partnerships aimed at stopping violence before it happens.

In 1999-2000, 14,570 women and children received safe shelter, and transition house staff responded to 34,980 crisis and support calls.

Counselling and support services

Since 1991, specialized services for women who experience violence in relationships have been established in communities throughout the province, supported with funding, training and policy co-ordination through the Ministry of Women's Equality. Community-based women's centres provide information and referral, support groups, crisis counselling and a range of services. Support for survivors of violence has increased from $1.1 million in 1991 to almost $37 million in 2000.

Significant changes have also been made in support of women who experience violence in relationships. The government recently adopted a proactive position in prosecuting these cases. It is now the responsibility of police and Crown counsel, not the victim, to lay and pursue criminal charges.

Transition programs

B.C. now has 87 transition houses, safe homes and second-stage houses, more than double the facilities available in 1992. In 1999-2000, 14,570 women and children received safe shelter, and transition house staff responded to 34,980 crisis and support calls.

Bridging programs

The Bridging Program, begun in Victoria in 1988, was the first of its kind in North America. In 1991/92, the B.C. government provided funding for additional programs around the province. It is a unique employability program for women who have experienced abuse. Bridging programs assist women in overcoming the additional barriers which prevent them from making successful movement towards personal and financial independence. The 1999/2000 budget for Bridging programs was $4.3 million.

Children who witness abuse

In 1992/93, B.C. introduced this community-based program that provides individual and group counselling services for children witnessing the abuse of a parent. Designed to help break the intergenerational cycle of violence against women, the program helps children cope with, and heal from, the trauma of living in an abusive situation. Support is also given to the parent (usually the mother) who has been the victim of abuse.

Reproductive Choice

We believe that women should have control over their bodies, including the right to choose when and how they have their children.

Better access to emergency contraception
In December 2000, goverment improved access to Emergency Contraception Pills (ECPs) by allowing specially trained pharmacists to dispense the pills without a prescription. Research indicates that ECPs can dramatically reduce the number of teenage pregnancies and the number of therapeutic abortions.

Safe abortion services
Women who select abortion services need to be free from harassment or intimidation. They want to be supported by capable and caring medical and social services. In 1995, the government introduced the Access to Abortion Services Act and established "bubble zones." Areas free of anti-choice protestors around locations where abortions are performed, these bubble zones provide safety for women choosing abortion services and for their health-care providers.

Midwifery services
In 1998, the B.C. government introduced measures to enable women to receive midwifery services at no cost through the Medical Services Plan. Registered midwives are independent practitioners, regulated by the College of Midwives of British Columbia.

Women's Health

Because women must look after their families as well as themselves, their health is an asset to be protected.

Women's income, working conditions, social status and education all influence their health. Women also have special health concerns as a result of their biological makeup.

B.C.'s Screening Mammography Program
In 1994, B.C. developed the first government-funded breast screening program in Canada. This program has expanded throughout the province to include 21 fixed screening sites, 14 ancillary sites, and 3 mobile units. It is the most successful breast screening program in North America, as indicated by the large numbers of women screened. The Ministry of Health has invested approximately $66.6 million for screening and $750,000 for breast cancer research since the program's inception.

Women's Health Bureau
Set up in 1994, the bureau promotes understanding of women's health care issues and encourages a health care system responsive to the unique needs of women.

B.C. Women's Hospital and Health Centre
Established in Vancouver in 1994, the centre provides a range of services in areas such as osteoporosis, infertility, recurrent pregnancy loss, sexual health, contraception, abortion services and counselling, midwifery, prenatal diagnosis, and community education on women's health issues.

Increasing Women's Influence

For too long, the voices and perspectives of women were excluded from decision-making.

Qualified and talented British Columbia women, representing the full spectrum of the community, now play major roles in the senior decision-making ranks of the provincial government.

- Women make up 49 per cent of the British Columbia Cabinet for the first time in British Columbia's history, a share of representation roughly equivalent to their proportion in the population.
- The number of women deputy ministers rose from 12 per cent in 1991 to 34.1 per cent in 1999.
- Women now fill 46 per cent of provincial appointments to agencies, boards and commissions, compared with only 25 per cent in 1991.
- Youth on Boards brings the youth perspective to provincial decision-making tables. There are currently 62 young British Columbians serving on provincial agencies, boards and commissions, 53 per cent of whom are young women.

Future Focus

Women have made great strides in our province in the last decade but much more needs to be done to achieve economic equality – the top priority women have identified – and to realize our vision of a province where women's contributions are fully recognized, valued and supported.

Women contribute so much to our province as employees, as self-employed workers, as entrepreneurs and as members of our families and communities. It is past time that women achieved the status of full and equal partners in our society and economy.

To help achieve this goal, the government will continue to focus public education on the gender stereotypes and systemic discrimination that still influence and limit women's career choices and economic status. We will also continue to develop and implement tools such as the Gender Lens that assesses all government policies and programs in terms of how they affect women.

Equally important, we will continue to listen to the women of British Columbia and respond to their concerns. Because it is absolutely vital that women play an active role in shaping our future as a province – a future that honours and builds upon the hard work and achievement of all the women who've gone before us, and offers true equality and a wealth of opportunity for all women tomorrow.

Key Publications

Listed below are key publications produced by, or with the support of, the Ministry of Women's Equality. Most of these documents are available on our Web site at http://www.weq.gov.bc.ca

Women Count 2000: a booklet with demographic information about women's experiences in their homes, workplaces and communities, it highlights the diversity of women.

Women's Economic Security and Pay Equity: a discussion paper to guide consultations on economic equality for women in the new millennium.

Women's Equality in B.C. – Fact Sheet: a fact sheet that summarizes government-wide initiatives that contribute to achieving women's equality.

Are you Being Stalked?...: information (wallet card and pamphlet) that explains criminal harassment and steps women can take if they are being stalked. This information is available in English, Chinese and Punjabi.

A Safer Future for B.C. Women: an information package and application guidelines.

Economic Gender Equality Indicators (Federal-Provincial/Territorial Ministers Responsible for the Status of Women): a set of benchmarks that provide an overall picture of women's economic status across Canada.

Gender Lens: a guide to gender-inclusive policy and program development.

Keeping Safe – Women at Work: a poster that offers tips and advice for improving women's safety in the workplace. This poster is available in English, Chinese, Korean, Spanish and Punjabi.

Live Violence Free: an information resource kit on preventing violence against women, available in English, Chinese, Punjabi and Japanese.

Ministry of Women's Equality Annual Report-1998-99: a report to the legislature that identifies the ministry's achievements.

Money Smarts for Young Women Kit: an information kit designed to encourage young women to take control of their financial future. A learning resource for educators is also part of this package.

Our HERitage: an annual newsletter that profiles achievements of women.

Paying for Violence: an analysis of some of the costs of violence against women in B.C.

Preventing Violence Against Women: a strategic framework for violence prevention developed by the Federal-Provincial/Territorial Ministers Responsible for The Status of Women.

Starting Your Own Business – A Resource Guide for Women: a guide that provides a framework for women to build business plans and access resources.

Stopping Violence Against Women: a booklet that provides a general overview of violence against women in BC and Canada and describes strategies to stop violence against women.